Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the LinkWISCONSIN initiative all about?

A:

LinkWISCONSIN is a state-wide initiative to promote the availability and sustainable adoption of broadband internet access. The first phase of the project includes development of a comprehensive broadband coverage map and the identification of strategies for broadband expansion and adoption – particularly in historically unserved or under-served areas.

In November, 2009 the federal Dept. of Commerce awarded a grant under the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) State Broadband Data Development Program (SBDDP) to the Wisconsin Public Service Commission (PSC). Through an RFP process, the PSC selected the LinkAmerica Alliance, a consortium of mapping and planning service providers, and the project's primary contractor. The grant is funding the State's efforts to (a) comply with federal requirements relative to the submission of data in support of the NTIA's national broadband map and (b) develop Wisconsin broadband service maps and regional broadband plans.

The goal of the LinkWISCONSIN project is three-fold:

o Map where current broadband service is available, where it is not, and more importantly, **why** it is not.
o Work with leaders from around the state to develop a vision for a broadband in Wisconsin.
o Organize and facilitate the development of regional broadband deployment and adoption plans that ultimately result in the extension of access to underserved constituents.

Q: How long will it take?

A:

The SBDDP provided grants for the development an updating of broadband maps over a two year period and planning activities over a three year period. The grant award date was November 9, 2009, so the mapping project will continue through November 2011 and planning through November 2012. It is quite likely that the final deployment and adoption work specified in the planning process will continue well beyond 2012. In addition, Wisconsin is meeting federal requirements for the submission of data important to the development of a national broadband map that must be published by February 11, 2011.

Q: How much will it cost and how is it being paid for?

A:

The LinkWISCONSIN initiative is funded through a $1.7 million federal grant as well as $429,421 in state matching funds and in-kind services. The PSC has selected the LinkAmerica Alliance, a consortium of experienced mapping and planning entities led by CostQuest Associates Inc., as the primary vendor for the project. All program activities in the state are overseen by the Wisconsin PSC.

Q: Will the LinkWISCONSIN project actually provide internet service to me?

A:

No. LinkWISCONSIN is not an Internet service provider. The project team is, however, working with broadband service providers from across the state to identify gaps in service areas. The LinkWISCONSIN team is also working with state-level and regional teams to determine barriers to deployment and adoption. The project's goal is to promote both the availability and usage of high-speed Internet to enhance the quality of life in Wisconsin. Your broadband service will be provided through a business arrangement between you and a Wisconsin service provider of your choice – or Internet service provided through your local community, if it is offered as a community utility.

Q: What is broadband?

A:

The terms broadband and high-speed internet access are often used to mean the same thing. For the purposes of this program, the NTIA has defined broadband service as *a minimum 768 kilobits per second (Kbps) downstream speed, coupled with a minimum 200 Kbps upstream speed - which is about 14 times faster than dial-up service.*

While the NTIA may provide the technical definition, it may be more easily understood in defining what broadband can provide. Broadband is helpful (if not necessary) to engage in many of the economic and educational and social interactions taking place across the state, country and world today. In its more down to earth application, broadband allows patients living in rural areas without local access to specialty healthcare to see a specialist over the local family physician's computer equipment. It allows farmers access to information on weather conditions, planting seasons and equipment, and allows them a way to share information on their farms to educate citizens on the importance of agriculture.

High-speed Internet connects businesses to the world, students to education, citizens to government services, military families to loved ones serving overseas, libraries to patrons and much more. Broadband makes it easier to launch a business or work from home, obtain a college degree, pay bills, conduct research and complete homework, or simply to exchange e-mails or photos with family and friends or stay connected through social networks like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Q: What technologies are being considered for the delivery of broadband service?

A:

LinkWISCONSIN considers all technologies fair game for the delivery of broadband service across Wisconsin. The project does not have a bias or preference toward a technology or a provider. As such, traditional wired services (such as DSL) are in the mix as well as cable (TV) based, wireless broadband (e.g., 3G services), and a host of fixed wireless service alternatives. Relatively new opportunities, such as BPL (broadband over powerline) are included as well - as long as the service delivers the minimum speeds and is within an affordable price range (comparable to other providers in the area).

Q: Who will decide who delivers service to my home?

A:

LinkWISCONSIN's mission is to help identify un-served areas in the state, facilitate the development of broadband demand, encourage the development of value adding content (e.g., eMed, eLearning, etc.) and ultimately attract and assist quality service providers to develop sustainable business models for the provisioning of broadband across the state. In an ideal situation, you will have multiple choices for your broadband service. And ultimately, you and you alone will decide which service provider is best for you. It may be that in some areas of the state, it is not financially feasible for a provider to expand infrastructure into areas where one or two families live per mile. In these cases, the LinkWISCONSIN team will help identify grant sources to assist providers in making infrastructure investments in that community.

Q: Why is it necessary to map where current service exists?

A:

Broadband mapping is an important first step from a couple of perspectives. First and foremost, developing detailed service maps is a great way to organize and conduct a comprehensive inventory of service (by connection speed) across the entire state with a spotlight on where there are un-served or under-served areas. This core information helps to focus policymakers, community leaders, service providers and others on the central issue at hand: where is the existing digital divide and how can we best close that gap? The service maps are also an excellent first step in engaging all providers across the state in a joint effort to identify and solve an issue that is far larger than any one of them.

The LinkWISCONSIN approach takes great care to develop the maps in a way that protects the valuable business information enjoyed by each of the service providers. Also, having the LinkWISCONSIN broadband service maps on a website will help the citizens of Wisconsin (consumers and businesses) locate and register their service needs with the initiative and again, help ensure the focus on service gaps is maintained.

Q: …but don't service providers know where the gaps are?

A:

This is a complicated question. In many ways, the most important 'gap' is really a product of what a consumer wants and when they want it. On one level, a service provider certainly knows where they put equipment and what may be the maximum coverage that equipment can address. But they likely don't know much about the areas in which they do not have equipment deployed. If you think about this across dozens of providers, it becomes even harder for any individual ISP to know where service doesn't exist at all.

On a second level, consider that equipment is placed to satisfy an area's estimated demand. What happens from a demand perspective within that area will change over time. So for a wireline provider, there may have been adequate cable pairs to satisfy demand at one point—but if the area has grown, existing facilities may no longer be adequate. For the case of a wireless provider, maybe equipment, such as a repeater, needs to be added to support changes in how roads run, new traffic volumes or trees which grew into an antenna path. Mapping where service is not available, as well as where people who don't have it want it, can help identify where facilities may need to be reinforced to provide adequate coverage.

In conclusion, putting all of these dynamic issues on one map helps providers (and policymakers) evaluate new service opportunities and isolate areas where coverage can be improved.

Q: Is LinkWISCONSIN a part of state or federal government?

A:

LinkWISCONSIN is a statewide project launched by the PSC and funded through a federal grant. The project team is accountable to the PSC. The project is designed to address Wisconsin's broadband priorities and related federal data submission requirements regarding the development of a national broadband map.

Q: If I already have broadband in my home / business should I even care about this project?

A:

Broadband connectivity is a proven key to the economic, educational, health and cultural opportunities that exist for all of us. As we all work together to close the broadband gap that currently exists within our state, we will all benefit from a closer / more accessible community. Business development will be made easier. Faith-based, social services and government will be made more efficient. Healthcare options will be improved. Educational opportunities will expand. And, Wisconsin will recognize economic growth and become an even greater place to call home.

Q: I live in the rural area and don't own a computer; why should I care about this project?

A:

In several ways, this work is all about YOU. Broadband access to the internet is very important to our economic development opportunities…to our employment opportunities…and to the quality of life we have come to appreciate for ourselves and our children. Many areas of the state are at risk of being left behind in this fast-paced world we now all share. The central goal of this project is to help ensure that doesn't happen to you. The LinkWISCONSIN team looks forward to working with you and others to explore the personal and business benefits available through high speed access to the internet. .